

When I heard about the GEE in my international business class around six weeks ago, I was initially extremely excited, but soon was slightly nervous when I learnt that I would be the leader of my team. Given a choice I would not have chosen to be a team leader, simply because I have never done it before. However, there is always a first time and I am glad GEE was my first real leadership experience.

Since the competition has started, my team and I met over ten virtual meetings to plan and prepare the business proposal. We kept in touch through Basecamp, Campfire and emails. After each meeting I would debrief what was discussed in that meeting to ensure everyone was on track of what had to be done. This ensured that most of the time work was of good quality and on time. However there was one member of the team from Africa who had difficulty accessing Campfire, hence I would update him separately through emails and then upload his replies on Basecamp for the rest of the team.

Even though I was slightly intimidated by the idea that I was to lead a team, as the team and project progressed I was amazed that I could use certain skills that I never realised I had. Every passing day only boosted my confidence. One such skill I used was communicating diplomatically. Our first few meetings dealt with which indigenous group to work on. While three members strongly chose Colombia, another team member preferred Africa. As the leader I had to make sure that my "vote" was not put across as being biased to one community or team member over the other, but was based on true merits to the proposal.

Another life skill I have learnt is that as a leader, one needs to be strong in enforcing what is best for the team and the project. One of the team members from Australia would hardly communicate with or contribute to the team. It was my duty as the leader to be firm and inform the member that this was unacceptable and later had to eliminate her from the project. Being an introvert, this was not an easy job but it had to be done in order to be fair to the rest of the team.

Through the GEE, I have grown in many ways. Not only have I learnt more about my capabilities, but have also understood what makes a true leader. Working with a global team, I had to constantly monitor my behaviour which had highlighted the importance of not judging a person based on their culture. I was pleased when I realised that patience and empathy come naturally to me, as has also been said by my entire team. From my previous knowledge and class discussions, I expected my team to be constantly waiting for me, their leader, to tell them what to do as everyone in the team comes from a collectivistic society. However, in our very first meeting itself I understood that everyone was confident and always ready to contribute their ideas, without too much encouragement from me. I had to therefore adapt to this atmosphere to suit my colleagues' personalities better. I did sometimes have to push them to think "stupid" and "crazy" to bring out everyone's creativity, including mine. This helped everyone think outside the box, which led to some outstanding ideas for our proposal.

Despite all the experiences and learning I went through, GEE was not all fun. There were difficulties I had to face throughout the competition. Given that my team members were from all corners of the world, deciding a meeting time that suited everyone's lifestyle was tough. I had to sacrifice many nights of sleep to attend the meetings that were during the day for the others. Being a student with five high level papers and three voluntary jobs, this was extremely difficult to cope with but it had to be done and it was done. I was especially proud of my commitment towards the project when it had shown a positive impact on my team. They happily put in extra effort to take the proposal to a higher quality, some spending their nights on it themselves.

The most important fact I have learnt through GEE is that by being a leader, one has to be aware that their team always looks up to them, whether they are from an individualistic or collectivistic society. Unless you are committed and ahead of the game yourself, you cannot expect your team to do the same.

I am very glad that GEE came my way as it has built a confidence in me. I believe if I have done it once, I can do it again.

*Note: English is my second language, first being Telugu, an Indian language.*